



MELOPSITTACUS UNDULATUS.

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Warbling Grass-Parrakeet.

Psittacus undulatus, Shaw, Nat. Misc., pl. 673.—Kuhl, Consp. Psitt. in Nova Acta, &c., vol. x. p. 49.

Undulated Parrot, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. ii. p. 179, pl. xxvi.

Undulated Parrakeet, *Psittacus undulatus*, Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. viii. p. 469.

Nanodes undulatus, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 277.—Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiv. p. 119.—Lear's Ill. Psitt., pl. 13.—Selby, Nat. Lib., Parrots, p. 181, pl. 19.

Euphema undulata, Wagl. Mon. Psitt. in Abhand., &c., pp. 493, 545, and 707.

Canary Parrot, Colonists.

Betcherrygah, Natives of Liverpool Plains.

AMONG the numerous members of the family of Parrots inhabiting Australia, this lovely little bird is pre-eminent both for beauty of plumage and elegance of form, which, together with its extreme cheerfulness of disposition and sprightliness of manner, render it an especial favourite with all who have had an opportunity of seeing it alive. This animated disposition is as conspicuous in confinement as in its native wilds; a pair now before me are in exuberant health after having braved the severities of a passage to this country by way of Cape Horn in the midst of winter.

The first notice of this species was published by Dr. Shaw in his "Naturalist's Miscellany," and until lately, a single specimen, forming part of the collection of the Linnean Society, was the only one known; more recently, however, numbers have been added to our museums, and the bird is now far from being scarce. In all probability it is generally dispersed over the central parts of Australia; but is so exclusively an inhabitant of the vast inland plains, or, if I may so call it, basin of the interior, that it is rarely seen between the mountain ranges and the coast. In the whole southern portion of the continent it is strictly migratory, appearing in large flocks in spring, when the grass-seeds are plentiful, and retiring again after the breeding-season is over to more northern latitudes. My friend Captain Sturt, in one of his letters, dated at Adelaide, South Australia, informs me, that "The Scolloped Parrakeets," the name given to these birds in that part of the country, "are found in vast flocks in the interior, and make their appearance here about October, following each other in flights like Starlings, in company with the little Crested Parrot (*Nymphicus Novæ-Hollandiæ*), holding a due north and south course. The flight of both is very rapid, and although an interval of half an hour may elapse, they all wend their way in the same direction. Whence come they?"

On arriving at Brezi, to the north of Liverpool Plains, in the beginning of December, I found myself surrounded by numbers, breeding in all the hollow spouts of the large *Eucalypti* bordering the Mokai; and on crossing the plains between that river and the Peel, in the direction of the Turi Mountain, I saw them in flocks of many hundreds feeding upon the grass-seeds that were there abundant. So numerous were they, that I determined to encamp on the spot, in order to observe their habits and procure specimens. The nature of their food and the excessive heat of these plains compel them frequently to seek the water; hence my camp, which was pitched near some small pools, was constantly surrounded by large numbers, arriving in flocks varying from twenty to a hundred or more. The hours at which they were most numerous were early in the morning, and some time before dusk in the evening. Before going down to drink, they alight on the neighbouring trees, settling together in clusters, sometimes on the dead branches, and at others on the drooping boughs of the *Eucalypti*. Their flight is remarkably straight and rapid, and is generally accompanied by a screeching noise. During the heat of the day, when sitting motionless among the leaves of the gum-trees, they so closely assimilate in colour, particularly on the breast, that they are with difficulty detected.

It is known that migratory birds after a time forsake the districts they have been accustomed to frequent, and resort to others where they had scarcely ever before been seen: in confirmation of this view, I may state that the natives had never before observed this species in the districts where I found it so abundant; while on the lower Namoi, where formerly they had been very numerous, there was this year scarcely one to be found.

The breeding-season is at its height in December, and by the end of the month the young are generally capable of providing for themselves; they then assemble in vast flights, preparatory to their great migratory movement. The eggs are three or four in number, pure white, nine lines long by seven lines in diameter, and are deposited in the holes and spouts of the gum-trees without any nest.

The beauty and interesting nature of this little bird naturally made me anxious to bring home living examples; I accordingly captured about twenty fully fledged birds, and kept them alive for some time; but the difficulties necessarily attendant upon travelling in a new country rendering it impracticable to afford them the attention they required, I regret to say the whole were lost. My brother-in-law, Mr. Charles Coxen, who resides on the Peel, having succeeded in rearing several, kindly presented me with four, two of which,

as before mentioned, have reached England in perfect health. As cage-birds they are as interesting as can possibly be imagined; for, independently of their highly ornamental appearance, they differ from all the other members of their family that I am acquainted with, in having a most animated and pleasing song; besides which, they are constantly billing, cooing, and feeding each other, and assuming every possible variety of graceful position. Their inward warbling song, which cannot be described, is unceasingly poured forth from morn to night, and is even continued throughout the night if they are placed in a room with lights, and where an animated conversation is carried on.

In a state of nature they feed exclusively upon grass-seeds, with which their crops are always found crammed: in confinement they thrive equally well upon canary-seed.

The sexes are precisely alike in the colouring and marking of their plumage, and gain their full livery in about eight months, or at the second moult from the time of leaving the breeding-place.

The young are distinguished from the adults by the crown of the head, which is yellow in the adult, being crossed by numerous fine bars of brown, by the absence of the deep blue spots on the throat, and by the irides being brownish grey.

The adults have the forehead and crown straw yellow; the remainder of the head, ear-coverts, nape, upper part of the back, scapularies and wing-coverts pale greenish yellow, each feather having a crescent-shaped mark of blackish brown near the extremity, these marks being numerous and minute on the head and neck; wings brown; the outer webs of the feathers deep green, margined with greenish yellow; face and throat yellow, ornamented on each cheek with a patch of rich blue, below which are three circular drops or spots of bluish black; rump, upper tail-coverts, and all the under surface bright green; two centre tail-feathers blue; the remaining tail-feathers green, crossed in the middle by an oblique band of yellow; irides straw white; nostrils bright blue in some, greenish blue and brown in others; legs pale bluish lead colour.

The figures represent an old and a young bird of the natural size.